

VZCZCXRO8695
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHSB #0509 1651232
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 131232Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3021
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1310

UNCLAS HARARE 000509

AIDAC
SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DCHA/AA FOR MIKE HESS
AFR/AA FOR KATE ALMQUIST AND FRANKLIN MOORE
AFR/SA FOR ELOKEN, LDOBBINS, JKOLE
DCHA/OFDA FOR KLUU, ACONVERY, TDENYSENKO, LTHOMAS
DCHA/FFP FOR JBORNS, JDWORKEN, LPETERSON, ASINK
PRETORIA FOR JWESSEL, GJUSTE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PROTESTS FOOD THEFT AND TREATMENT OF U.S.
DIPLOMATS

REF: HARARE 493

1. (U) SUMMARY: On June 10 Ambassador McGee and USAID Director Karen Freeman called upon Ministry of Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary Joey Bimha. The agenda included three points: 1) to protest the treatment of U.S. diplomats during a recent confrontation with the police in Bindura; 2) to clarify the requirement that diplomats inform the Ministry prior to travel beyond 40km of the capitol; and 3) to protest the theft of 20 MT of USG humanitarian food commodities in the Marange District of Manicaland on June 6. While the meeting did secure the Minister's agreement that diplomats are free to travel without notification to the MFA and without receiving permission, the Minister denied any mistreatment of diplomats and claimed no knowledge of the food theft. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) On the issue of the detention and inappropriate treatment of Embassy personnel the Minister disputed the Ambassador's version of events (Ref). He said an initial detention in Bindura was to protect Embassy staff from a crowd that was angry at the staff's efforts to campaign for the MDC and distribute money. He denied the length of the subsequent detention in Mazowe, the disabling of the Embassy car, and the physical abuse of Embassy personnel. Bimha acknowledged that diplomats were free to travel, but said, citing the Vienna Convention, they could not interfere in Zimbabwe's internal affairs.

3. (SBU) The Ambassador raised the Government of Zimbabwe's (GOZ) requirement that notice was required for travel more than 40 kilometers outside of the capital Harare (which has been interpreted by the police as a requirement for a letter of permission), and reminded Permanent Secretary (PS) Bimha of a May 2006 GOZ diplomatic note that said notice of travel was a formality not a requirement. PS Bimha acknowledged that permission was not necessary for travel and that U.S. diplomats should not be required by police to produce any documentation of their travel. "If this is happening," he said, "it is unfortunate and we will discuss with the police." He noted that it was his responsibility to clarify this with the authorities and that he would do so. (COMMENT: The PS's tenor provided no assurance that these intrusions would not be repeated. He referred obliquely to past incidents involving abuses of Zimbabwean diplomats in the U.S. but would not elaborate. END COMMENT.)

4. (U) The Ambassador provided Bimha with details of the June 6 theft of 20 MT of USG food assistance by war vets, military, GOZ officials and ZANU-PF party supporters in the town of Bambazonke in eastern Zimbabwe. Bimha seemed not to understand the term "war vet" and disclaimed knowledge of the existence of the town in which the incident occurred. He said that he had requested a report on the incident and would let us know what he found out.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: Bimha treated the meeting with the Ambassador as an inconvenience. He was unwilling to acknowledge the truth of the detention of June 7 and seemed unconcerned about the theft of food on June 6. While he was forced to concede that the Vienna Convention provides for unrestricted diplomatic travel, he gave no indication that a concerted effort will be made to inform police and other authorities around the country that they should allow diplomats freedom of movement. END COMMENT.

MCGEE